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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

Letter dated 27 January 1995 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/155 of 20 December 1993, I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on 24 January 1995 concerning the adoption of the Law on Citizenship by the State Assembly of the Republic of Estonia.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the statement circulated as an official document of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly under the agenda item entitled "Human rights questions".

(Signed) S. LAVROV

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ANNEX

Statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on 24 January 1995 concerning the adoption of the Law on Citizenship by the State Assembly of the Republic of Estonia

Estonia has taken yet another regrettable step by enshrining in law the policy being pursued by the authorities of that country which aims to discriminate against Russian-speaking inhabitants and violate their fundamental rights.

On 19 January 1995, the State Assembly of the Republic of Estonia adopted a Law on Citizenship which in comparison with current legislation introduces substantially harsher conditions for acquiring citizenship through naturalization, increases residential qualifications, and imposes much more stringent requirements for knowledge of the Estonian language. In practice, the application of this law deprives a large part of the Russian-speaking population of the opportunity to acquire Estonian citizenship and prevents non-Estonian citizens from integrating naturally.

A number of provisions of the Law on Citizenship are at variance with contemporary trends regarding legislation on citizenship in European countries, and could result in the wholesale loss of citizenship for permanent residents of the country. The adoption of the law violates the Estonia obligations under the Treaty on Basic Relations between Estonia and the Russian Federation concluded on 12 January 1991.

Estonian parliamentarians have therefore failed to heed the recommendations of experts from European countries and have ignored numerous appeals from social organizations in the country.

On balance, the adoption of the new Law on Citizenship could exacerbate the already difficult relations between ethnic groups in the country.

Tallinn should clearly understand that ratification of this law in its present form cannot fail to complicate Russian-Estonian relations. The Russian Federation reserves the right to take additional measures to protect the rights and interests of ethnic Russians living in Estonia.

What is at issue is the protection of the rights of hundreds and thousands of people whose lives will be very adversely affected by the adoption of the Law on Citizenship in Estonia, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation hopes that competent international organizations and member States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe will not overlook this decision by the legislators of the Estonian Republic.